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Plain Talk for parents about your 3 to 4 year old

Understanding your 3 to 4 year old

Every child and parent is unique. This brochure highlights some general patterns of growth and development that apply to most children. As you watch, listen to, and play with your child, you will discover when she or he is ready for new activities and skills. You will find your own ways to use old and new ideas, to fit your individual personality, your family life, and your child's needs.

General Traits

- Enjoys walking, running, jumping, riding, and climbing
- Likes activities such as play dough, blocks and cars, drawing, simple puzzles
- Stuttering, nail-biting, thumb-sucking, and similar habits are normal for children this age
- Likes to ask questions: Why? How? What? When?
- Wants to do everything a certain way, likes routines
- Many children are consistently dry, at least in the daytime
- Occasionally still reverts to baby-like behavior
- Friends are extremely important, but skills in dealing with them are few
- Make believe play is beginning

What a Parent Can Do

- Allow your child to talk about feelings and help by giving names to feelings (sad, glad, scared, mad).
- Friends are important now. Look for ways for your child to spend time with other children. One way might be to arrange a special weekly play time with two or three friends of the same age.
- Find a regular time to read and look at books with your child.
- Be consistent with rules.
- Encourage independence with simple tasks. Your child may be able to help with supper by washing vegetables, tearing lettuce, stirring batters, or by setting the table.
- Teach the importance of privacy. Practice showing (like a game) that a shut door requires respect and a knock on the door may help gain entrance.
- Don't worry if your child dislikes certain foods such as vegetables. Offer small food portions, with a choice if possible.
- Give short simple answers to your child's questions about sex, as you do to questions about other things.

Toys for the 3-4 year old

Cars and trucks	Small toy animals and people
Puzzles with 6 to 8 pieces	Colored paper and paste, crayons and large pencils
Dolls and teddy bears	Play dough
Costume box (hats, gloves, purses, lengths of cloth)	Variety of blocks
Blunt scissors (sturdy and fairly large)	Finger paints
Musical toys	Books
Balls	Soap bubbles and a straw for blowing
Riding toys	Pegs and pegboard